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## THE CIVILIZATION OF CANAAN IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY B. C. II.<sup>2</sup>

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BETWEEN the various peoples of Palestine and Syria, and between them and their neighbors, an extensive trade was carried on. Caravans are frequently mentioned, and one of the chief duties of the subject-princes was to protect these while passing through their territories. Merchants were exposed to perils from robber tribes and from wild beasts; but undismayed they journeyed constantly to and fro between Egypt and Babylon, and, it is possible, penetrated even into central and into southern Asia. Ships are mentioned both in the Annals and in the Amarna letters. Even at this early date the Phœnicians had attained the maritime supremacy which characterized them centuries later. A further evidence of commercial activity is afforded by the tribute lists. Nearly the same articles were presented by cities in various parts of the land; and as these articles could not all have been produced in the places from which they were sent, it is clear that some of them must have been obtained by trade with other regions. Thus we find ivory, which was distinctly a product of Naharina, sent as tribute by Cyprus and by the cities of Phœnicia, where there is no reason to believe that elephants were hunted. In like manner copper was furnished by all the towns, whereas it was produced only in a limited area. Lapis-lazuli and malachite, which so many of the Palestinian princes possessed, were both imported. The same is true of many of the gems that were taken as spoil. Gold and silver also, as previously remarked, must have been obtained entirely by commerce. The Egyptian conquest did much to promote the development of trade, both by securing greater safety for the caravans and by increasing the demand

<sup>2</sup>Concluded from the BIBLICAL WORLD for July, 1902, pp. 25-30.

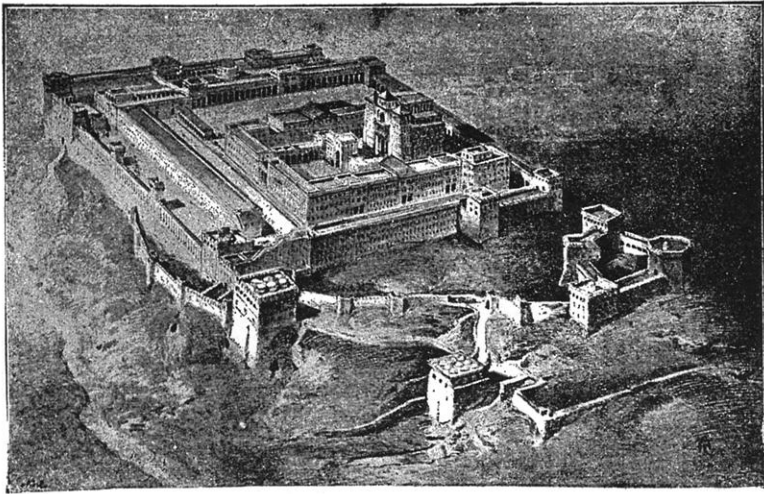
for Syrian products. A brisk traffic was kept up with the provinces; and in the peaceful period of Amenhotep III. the wealth of Syria and Palestine greatly increased. The picture that we derive from the contemporary records is of a rich and happy country, well furnished with all the necessities of life, and possessing a degree of luxury that compares favorably with many portions of modern Europe.

As media of exchange both gold and silver were in use. Silver is always named first. This usage, which is retained in the Old Testament, dates from a time when silver, as the harder metal to mine and to smelt, was more valuable than gold. In the time of the Amarna letters the ratio was probably 10 to 1 in favor of gold. Silver was in commoner use, and, as in the Old Testament, it was the general name for "money." The quantity of these precious metals that Thothmes received during his long reign is almost incredible. That such great treasures should have been stored up in small places, and that, after repeated plundering, they should be able to pay additional sums, is evidence of the remarkable wealth of the country. Gold and silver were not coined, although they were sometimes cast into pieces of a definite weight. Commonly they were formed into rings, which may have been used also as bracelets. In commercial transactions they were weighed, the standards being the ordinary Babylonian shekel, containing about 252 grains troy, the mina containing 60 shekels, and the talent containing 60 minas. Measures of length and of capacity were also Babylonian.

Tolls were demanded by the princes upon goods passing through their territories, except when this was prohibited by the general government. At the Egyptian frontier import duty was collected, and several of the Syrian princes complained that in their imposition an unfair discrimination was made. It is clear from the Amarna letters that certain principles of international law were recognized; Syrians living in Egypt had rights, as well as Egyptians living in Syria. One of the letters from Alashia, that is, probably, Cyprus, makes claim upon the Pharaoh for the property of a native of Alashia who has died in Egypt. When

injury was inflicted upon caravans passing through a particular territory, its ruler was held accountable. A claim was even made by the king of Babylon upon the king of Egypt for the loss of a caravan in the land of Canaan.

Architecture had attained a high development in the commercial cities of Phœnicia. The models were Babylonian, but there was considerable independence in the elaboration of



THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON, AFTER A MODEL BY DR. SCHICK.

details. Temples were built of stone or of brick, and were so massive that they served as fortresses as well as sanctuaries. The temple built for Solomon by Phœnician architects is a good specimen of the edifices that were to be found in all the larger cities of Syria at the time of the Egyptian supremacy.

Of the plastic art of the Canaanites we have abundant evidence in the captured articles. Among these are graceful vases and ornamental dishes of metal and of pottery. We read in the tribute-lists of lion-heads of gold, heads of deer, goats, and bears, statues of gold, of silver, and of ivory. The Annals speak also of tables and chairs of *kharub*-wood inlaid with ivory, gold, and precious stones; of tent-poles plated with silver and gold and inlaid with gems; of statues with carved heads inlaid with gold, silver, and ivory.

Several of the towns of Palestine were famous for the manufacture of artistic war-chariots, that were superior in design and in finish to anything produced in Egypt. These chariots were built of *zagu*-wood, and were covered with gold, silver, or copper. They were inlaid with metals, or with amber and ivory. The weapons with which they were furnished were of bronze artistically inlaid with gold and with silver. Thothmes captured 892 of these in a single battle. Mention is made in the Annals of sixty-one painted chariots, and the chariots that were taken in central Syria were adorned, not merely with gold and silver, but also with colors. As tribute from central and northern Syria Thothmes received a variety of pigments. These statements seem to indicate that the art of painting was also understood.

Of the cultivation of music we have only indirect evidence. Two Egyptian musical instruments, the *ken'noru*, or "lyre," and the *natakhi*, or "castanet," have Semitic names,<sup>3</sup> and were probably derived from Canaan. The presence of musical instruments implies the existence of song, and song implies a development of poetry. The dance also seems to have been cultivated as an art, if we may judge from representations of Syrian slaves on the Egyptian monuments.

After the battle of Megiddo Thothmes carried away a company of artisans, and during his long reign no less than eight thousand skilled workmen were transported to Egypt. In the latter part of the eighteenth and in the nineteenth dynasty Egyptian art underwent a marked change, in the cultivation of greater freedom, in the use of animal forms in ornamentation, and in the introduction of certain decorative types. All these new elements can be traced directly to Syrian influence.

The art of writing was understood, as is proved by the Amarna letters and by the similar document found at Tell-el-Hesi. These letters were written on clay tablets in the Babylonian language and in the cuneiform character. Ideographs are frequently avoided; and, to facilitate reading, phonetic signs are preferred. The script of the letters from Syria and Palestine is

<sup>3</sup>MÜLLER, *Asien und Europa*, p. 306.

identical with that of Babylonian inscriptions of the same period; but that of the letters from Mitanni is similar to later Assyrian. This is interesting as showing that Assyria derived its writing, not directly from Babylon, but rather from Mesopotamia. One letter, written by a Hittite prince, shows a curious mixture of Babylonian with his native language; and in another letter, sent by the Pharaoh to Tarkhundaraush, a Hittite king, the Hittite language is used. A letter from Mitanni also is written in the language of that country. In general, however, no attempt is made to adapt the Babylonian character to the native language, although the glosses in the letters show how easy it would have been to have written them entirely in Canaanitic.

The fact that writing was done exclusively in a foreign language and in a difficult character necessitated a class of professional scribes. The scribes were not equally proficient. Mistakes are frequent in the Amarna letters, and there are times when the author is ignorant of the Babylonian word that he needs and is compelled to substitute a Canaanitish word in its place. The foreign office in Egypt maintained a translation bureau. Difficulty seems often to have been experienced in rendering the documents, for we find lines drawn in red ink upon the tablets to indicate the divisions between the words, and a number of mythological texts that served as reading exercises have also been discovered. Kirjath-sepher, or Kirjath-sopher, as it probably should be vocalized, according to the lists of Thothmes III., may mean the "city of scribes," and may have been a place in which men were trained in the use of the Babylonian language. The Babylonian system of writing in Syria exerted a strong influence upon Egyptian orthography. The lists of Thothmes show an attempt at a syllabic, phonetic spelling which can be due only to the fact that the names were written originally in cuneiform and were afterward transliterated into Egyptian. From the time of Thothmes III. onward this system underwent steady development, and in the period of the Amarna letters we find its most consistent use.

The social organization of the Canaanites was patriarchal.

The father was the absolute ruler of the household. Wives were bought, and differed little from slaves. Polygamy was general, at least among the wealthier classes. Children were subject to the will of their father, and might be put to death or sent into slavery at his pleasure. The princes of Palestine give their sons as hostages and their daughters as concubines, and mention is frequently made in the Amarna letters of children being sold into slavery in order to procure food in time of famine. Slaves formed a regular part of the household. They were captives taken in war, debtors, or the children of slaves.

The old Semitic tribal constitution was still maintained. The people of one city were members of the same clan, and the people of a number of adjacent cities belonged to the same tribe. The chief of the clan was the head of the city; and where a group of clans inhabited the same district, the chief of the principal city was the lord of the entire region. The political unit was the walled city, with its circle of unwalled towns, ruled by a *melek*, that is, originally "a counselor," and then "a king." A kingship of this sort was usually hereditary in the leading family of the tribe. The chieftains of the Amarna letters never venture to call themselves "king" in their letters to the Pharaoh, but designate themselves rather as *khazani* or "chiefs;" in their letters to one another, however, they employ the name "king." At the time of the Egyptian supremacy Syria and Palestine embraced a large number of petty principalities. The condition was practically the same as that which the Israelites found at the time of their entrance into Canaan. The larger cities were ruled by independent kings, who were engaged in constant warfare with one another, except when peril compelled them to forget their enmities and to unite, for the time being, in common defense. Such alliances were made repeatedly against the Egyptians, just as they were made later against Israel; but they never developed into anything permanent, and were constantly liable to fall to pieces through the jealousy and suspicion of the allies.

In the art of war the Canaanites had attained great perfection. They were clad in suits of scale-armor of bronze. They

wore on their heads bronze helmets that tapered to a point and were ornamented with a small tassel. The armor and the helmets of the chieftains were inlaid with gold and with silver, and formed no inconsiderable part of the booty taken by Thothmes. Shields were of bronze and were inlaid with ornamental designs. Spears, swords, daggers, and bows of bronze are also mentioned.<sup>4</sup> Fighting was carried on mainly from war-chariots. Foot soldiers were also used, but cavalry was unknown.

The religion of Canaan was a mixture of old Semitic polydæmonism with elements of Babylonian and of Egyptian polytheism. Every natural object that displayed power was revered as divine. The heavenly bodies, wind, clouds, storm, and lightning received the homage that has been given them by all primitive races. Springs, and the trees that grew about them, were regarded with special reverence. Solitary stones, particularly meteors, like the black stone of Mecca, were held sacred. Caves with their mysterious darkness, and hilltops with their far-reaching views, made the Canaanite feel that he was in the presence of deity. The spirits of ancestors, and other nameless spirits, were also adored.

The gods were regarded as givers of the fruits of the earth and as the patrons of agriculture and civilization. Each tribe and each city had its patron deity, who might be one of the heavenly powers; the spirit of a local fountain, great tree, or sacred stone; or a deified ancestor. If one tribe or city, through conquest or commercial expansion, grew stronger than its neighbors, its deity tended to become a great god, and thus out of polydæmonism polytheism gradually developed.

In the Amarna letters the god most frequently mentioned is Addu, or Hadad, as he is called in the Old Testament. His worship prevailed in all parts of the land from Tunip in the north to Gaza in the south. He was a storm-god and was identified by the Babylonians with Ramman. We find mention also of Shamash (the sun) and of Ashtart (Astarte), a primitive Semitic deity, the original meaning of whose name is lost. Her symbol was the *asherah*, or upright post, and this word is frequently

<sup>4</sup> 2 Sam. 22 : 35.



interchanged with her own name. Anath, Resheph, and Qadesh, the god of the city of Qadesh, are also mentioned in the Egyptian inscriptions.

The question has been much discussed whether Yahweh,<sup>5</sup> the god of Israel, was worshiped in Canaan at this time. In the Annals of Thothmes a place called Beth-Yah is mentioned as early as 1500 B. C., and this has been supposed to indicate a sanctuary of Yahweh. Other proper names in the Egyptian records have the ending *yah*, which we meet in Hebrew as an abbreviation of Yahweh. When we consider the facts that Sinai was the original seat of the Yahweh religion, and that he was worshiped by the Midianites before he was adopted by Israel, it does not seem improbable that he was an ancient deity of the land of Canaan. In the Assyrian inscriptions of a later date Syrian proper names compounded with Yah are found. This indicates that knowledge of this deity was not limited to Israel.

The Babylonian gods mentioned in the Amarna letters are Ninib, Urash, Bel, Ramman, Dagan, Ishtar, and Shamash. Sin appears also in the names of places. The only Egyptian god mentioned is Amen-Ra, the great god of Thebes, who is identified with Shamash. To him, as the god of the state, temples were dedicated through Syria and Palestine. His cult, however, seems to have been more a matter of form than of conviction, for there are few traces of it, and it disappeared as soon as Egyptian rule was relaxed.

Deities were commonly called, not by their personal names, but by a general title, such as god, lord, master, or king. This usage seems to have arisen partly through fear and partly through ignorance of the names of the spirits that haunted particular localities. The most common title was Baal, "lord" or "proprietor," for male deities, and Baalat, "lady," for female deities. The Baal, or the Baalat, of a place was the particular divinity that happened to be worshiped there, either as a tribal god or as the spirit of a spring, sacred tree, or holy stone. Neither

<sup>5</sup> The pronunciation Jehovah (Yehowah) is due to the reading of the vowels of Adonai, "Lord," with the consonants of Yahweh.

Baal nor Baalat is a proper name, but is rather a title that may apply to any deity. The Old Testament speaks frequently of the Baalim, or "lords," meaning thereby the local divinities to whom belonged the various shrines and sanctuaries through the land. When the singular is employed, the reference is always to the "proprietor" of a particular holy place.

In view of the fact that this usage of the name Baal is attested by proper names of a later period, and by the Hebrew records, it is surprising that it does not occur in the Amarna letters. In the name Bel-garib, Bel is probably not the Canaanitish Baal, but the Babylonian god Bel. Instead of Baal as a generic name for deity, we find in proper names and in other cases Ilu, that is, Hebrew El, "god." On the other hand, Belit, "lady," is constantly used for "goddess," which shows that the corresponding name Baal was known to the Canaanites. The substitution of Ilu, accordingly, must have been due to the desire to avoid confusion with the Babylonian Bel. Instead of Baalat, we frequently find in the Amarna letters Ashtart used as a general name for "goddess." This is in imitation of the Babylonian usage of the name Ishtar.

The gods were conceived as inhabiting physical objects. Not only did they manifest themselves in living or moving things, but they dwelt also in *bethels* or "sacred stones," and in *asherahs* or "sacred posts." *Bethels* were numerous in the land of Canaan at the time of the conquest, and were revered by the Hebrews as having been set up by the patriarchs. Idols are mentioned in the Amarna letters. Several of the Amarna princes complain that their gods, that is, their images, have been forcibly taken from them, and beg the Pharaoh to use his influence to have them restored. This shows a complete identification of the gods with the images. Nevertheless, the gods were believed to be able to hear prayer and to exert their influence at a distance from their visible representations. They were the givers of all good things. They were the vindicators of oaths and the champions of justice and truth. In spite of the elements of naturalism that clung to them, there was much that was ideal in their character. They were worshiped in high-places, that is, sanctuaries placed

on hilltops. The simplest sort of shrine was a heap of stones that served as an altar. Dolmens, or stone tables, were used for the same purpose. A large number of these structures are still extant east of the Jordan, but only two are known to survive in western Palestine. Sometimes the altar was surrounded with a cromlech, or "ring of stones" (Hebrew *gilgal*), which served to mark off the holy precinct. Large cities constructed elaborate edifices upon the sites of ancient high-places. Temples are mentioned in the Amarna letters as buildings in which gold and silver were deposited. Priests and priestesses are also referred to. All these places of worship were adopted by the Israelites when they came into the land, and from the ritual of the Hebrew religion we may infer with considerable probability the forms that were practiced in earlier times. Sacrifice of cattle, sheep, and goats constituted a conspicuous part of the ritual of worship. In times of national peril, or when one was anxious to propitiate the deity, human sacrifice, particularly the sacrifice of the first-born son, was not infrequent. This practice was adopted by the ancient Hebrews, and centuries elapsed before it was fully eradicated.

Summing up this survey of the general characteristics of Canaanitish civilization, we are impressed with the close similarity that it bears to the civilization of the Hebrews. As one reads the Amarna letters, one almost imagines that one is reading the Old Testament. The explanation of this fact is obvious: The Hebrews entered Canaan a wild, nomadic people, with no civilization to retain, and with everything to learn. Not only did they occupy the cities and the houses of the Canaanites, but they adopted their arts, their sciences, and many elements of their religion. The civilization of the Amarna period, accordingly, has a peculiar interest as being the parent of the Hebrew civilization, which in its turn has so profoundly affected the later history of the world.